

Louis Michel
Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid
European Commission

29 February 2008
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Dear Mr Michel,

Forthcoming visit to Cuba

Ahead of your official visit to Cuba next week, Amnesty International would like to take the opportunity to send you a summary of our main concerns in relation to the human rights situation in Cuba. We welcome your visit and hopes that you will take advantage of this opportunity to raise a number of human rights concerns, and to offer support to the new leadership of Cuba in introducing much needed reforms to guarantee the protection of human rights. Reform in Cuba must start with the unconditional release of all prisoners of conscience, the judicial review of all sentences passed after unfair trials, the abolition of the death penalty and the introduction of measures to ensure respect of fundamental freedoms and the independence of the judiciary. Amnesty International calls on the new Cuban government to allow all United Nations' human rights bodies and independent human rights organisations to visit the country. Since 1988 Cuba has declined to reply to Amnesty International's requests to visit the country.

For the past 40 years the organisation has campaigned to stop and prevent human rights violations committed by the Cuban government. Amnesty International has also expressed serious concern about the negative impact of the United States' economic embargo on the ability of Cubans to fully enjoy their human rights. While the overall human rights concerns remain the same, there have been developments since July 2006, when Fidel Castro transferred his responsibilities to other senior officials, including his brother Raúl Castro Ruz. These include:

- the release of 8 prisoners of conscience and other political dissidents and the lessening in public harassment and intimidation of human rights activists and political dissidents by quasi-official groups in so-called acts of repudiation ("*actos de repudio*");
- the creation, in April 2007, of bilateral Consultation Mechanisms with the Spanish government, which included a formal human rights dialogue;
- the visit, in November 2007, of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food at the invitation of the Cuban government. This was the first such invitation to a UN special rapporteur in seven years; and
- the signature by the Cuban government, this week of the ICCPR and ICESCR

In spite of these developments, human rights violations remain widespread in Cuba. The attached briefing note, which we would be keen to discuss further with you ahead of your visit, outlines our concerns under a number of themes.

Yours sincerely,



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